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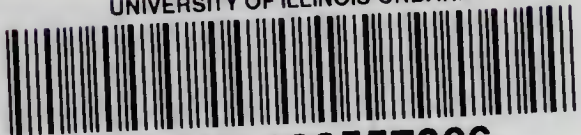
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hennepin canal parkway

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THE PARKWAY

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Hennepin Canal Parkway is a linear recreation area — 104.5 miles long and from 380 feet to one mile wide. Shaped like a T, the Parkway is located in Rock Island, Bureau, Henry, Lee and Whiteside counties and includes approximately 3,000 acres of land and over 3,500 acres of water. Its northern-most area is Lake Sinnissippi, a 2,400 acre pool in the Rock River at Sterling-Rock Falls. From Lake Sinnissippi, the Parkway extends almost due south 29.3 miles along the feeder canal. Just north of Interstate 80, about midway between Routes 78 and 88, the feeder meets the main canal. From this point the Parkway runs southwest 46.9 miles to the Mississippi River near Rock Island and southeast 28.4 miles to the Illinois River near the town of Hennepin.

The state of Illinois acquired the property in 1970.

THE CANAL

The man-made Hennepin Canal was used for navigation between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. It was a section of an all-water version of Interstate 80, opening a direct commercial link between the Upper Mississippi Valley and the east coast. When the canal was proposed in 1834, the idea was that boats could use it to cross the divide between the Mississippi and Illinois; and enter the Illinois and Michigan Canal which emptied into Lake Michigan at Chicago. Traffic would then proceed eastward across the Great Lakes to the Erie Canal and on to New York.

Construction of the Hennepin did not begin until 1890. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designed and built the canal (then known as the Illinois and Mississippi Canal). Its construction had major engineering and technological significance — the Hennepin was the first American canal built of concrete without stone cut facings. The locks on American canals had traditionally been built with hand-laid cut stone and the large scale use of concrete on the Hennepin Canal had a long range impact. The engineering innovations, material used and methods of dealing with it revolutionized the construction industry and set a pattern for canal construction — especially of the Panama Canal.

In 1895 the section of the canal between Milan on the Rock River and Rock Island on the Mississippi opened. From Milan to the mouth of the Green River the canal flows in the Rock River channel. Shipments of coal to Rock Island, a primary coaling station on the Mississippi, kept this portion busy until 1907. The rest of the mainline and feeder — flowing from the Rock River at Sterling-Rock Falls — opened in 1907. By connecting the Illinois and Mississippi, the Hennepin

reduced the through-water distance from Chicago to the Upper Mississippi by 419 miles.

From 1907 until 1951, the canal was open to commercial navigation unless closed by ice. Maintenance during these years included patrolling the banks repairing breaks, operating locks, repairing boats and barges, and so on. The Corps of Engineers employed at least 50 men full-time, year-round to do this work. These civilian employees were required to live in Corps-owned houses adjacent to the canal. Fifty-two such houses lined the canal in the years of commercial operations. *Six of the original houses still stand* on their original sites within the Parkway.

Because the Hennepin Canal was always the wrong size — first too large, then too small — for the system of which it was a part, commercial usage was disappointing. Consequently, in 1951 the Corps closed it to commercial navigation, but allowed recreational use to continue.

TECHNICAL DATA

The canal is 52 feet wide at its bottom and 80 feet wide at water level. Every 4 or 5 miles, there are wide spots for boats to pass each other and the canal is wider above and below locks, making it up to 100 yards across in places. Originally the depth of the water was 7 feet; the Department of Conservation currently attempts to keep it at a maximum of 5 feet. A towpath so that boats might be towed by animals (although this was never done) runs along the mainline and feeder.

The water for the canal is drawn from the Rock River and the dam across the river between Sterling and Rock Falls forms Lake Sinnissippi, its actual reservoir. Adjacent to the sluiceway which feeds water into the canal is the Guard Lock (#33), which is in operating condition. The water flows almost due south from these control structures through level prairie and meets the mainline in its 28th mile from the Illinois River on the summit level of the canal (the 11 highest miles of the mainline). From the junction of the feeder and the mainline, the “Y”, the water flows southwest towards the Mississippi and southeast towards the Illinois. From the summit level the mainline descends 93 feet in 46 miles to the Mississippi and 196 feet in 18 miles to the Illinois. There are more locks — functioning like a water elevator — between the summit level and the Illinois because the descent to the Illinois is more rapid and steeper.

LOCKS

The mainline’s 32 locks are known by number: Lock 1 is at the junction of the mainline and the Illinois River

an Lock 32 at the junction of the mainline and the Mississippi River. Thirty-one of these locks are still visible. (Lock 1 has been under the Illinois River for over fifty years). All are the same size: 170 feet long and 35 feet wide. Eighteen of the locks on the mainline originally had 2 sets of ordinary mitre gates — gates that open like a set of double doors. Fourteen (Locks 8-21) had Marshall gates at their upstream ends. Marshall gates are unique to the Hennepin Canal. The gate is a single gate extending from one wall to the other and is raised and lowered on a horizontal axis — opening like a rural mailbox.

Four locks on the mainline have been restored to working condition. Locks 22, 23 and 24 had 2 sets of mitre gates. Lock 16 had a Marshall gate at its upper end and a mitre gates at its lower end. The Corps modified the other 27 visible locks, removing the old gates and machinery from their upper ends. At Locks 2, 3, 5-11, 13-15, 17-21, 25, 28-32 they replaced this equipment with breastwalls, in effect turning the locks into spillways with waterfalls at their upstream ends. Locks 4, 12 and 27 have no waterfalls because they abutted aqueducts (bridges which carry one waterway across another) which have been removed. Water now enters these locks via syphon from the upper pool.

AQUEDUCTS

The Hennepin Canal originally crossed nine major streams or rivers in aqueducts, six of which are still in use. Smaller streams, creeks, or drainage facilities went under the canal by means of tubes, or culverts, running under the bed of the canal. There are 104 culverts under the canal; some can be clearly seen from the towpath.

FACILITIES

Day-Use Facilities: Consist of picnic tables, pit toilets, and parking areas. Most of the areas along the canal have these facilities.

Toilets: Locks 11, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 and Bridges 14, 15, 23 and Visitor Center area have toilet facilities.

Drinking Water: Drinking water is available at Locks 21, 22 and the Visitor Center area.

Visitor Center Complex: This complex includes information center, displays, flush toilets, drinking water, playground equipment, picnic areas, boat launching ramp, marina and maintenance headquarters.

Boating: Boating is permitted any place on the canal with 10 H.P., maximum, except there is unlimited H.P. between Bridge 37 & Lock 24.

Boat Launching Facilities: Launching ramps are located at: Visitor Center complex, Lock 21, Route 82 north of Geneseo (Izaak Walton League), and car top access at Route 78 north of Annawan, Bridge 14, Bridge 39, Bridge 35, Bridge 28 and Bridge 45.

Fishing: Anglers may fish at almost any spot on the canal. The most common catches in the canal are: bass, bullhead, crappie, carp, channel catfish, redear sunfish, bluegill, walleye, and northern pike. Statewide regulations apply except trot lines and bank poles are prohibited.

Hiking: Hiking is permitted the entire length of the towpath.

Bicycling: Bicycling is permitted the entire length of the towpath. Approximately five miles of limestone surfaced trail extends eastward from the Visitor Center to Lock 21.

Horse Trails: Horses are permitted along the corridor.

Snowmobiling: A 78 mile trail parallels the feeder section from Rock Falls south and west to Geneseo, and east to Bridge 3. Registration points are located at Locks 24, 23, 11 and Route 88 on the feeder and at the Visitor Center area.

Vehicles: Authorized vehicles ONLY are allowed on the towpath. All other vehicles are subject to arrest and fine.

Migratory Waterfowl Hunting: At Lake Sinnissippi blinds are drawn annually. Contact the Canal office for dates and regulations. Hunting dates and regulations for Lake Sinnissippi can be obtained by contacting the Canal office.

Dove Hunting: The Canal has a limited season at the main complex area.

Please: This area is for all to enjoy so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest available trash container. No plants or part of any tree may be removed or damaged. If you need help or have a question, contact the site superintendent.

Cross Country Skiing: 4½ miles of marked, groomed trail are provided at the Visitor Center area.

